

Ruth Kelly MP,
Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

Friday, February 10, 2006



Education White Paper – implications of business sponsorship on infant and young child health

Dear Ruth Kelly

On behalf of the Baby Feeding Law Group, an ad-hoc group of 15 leading health and mother-support organisations working to bring UK and EU legislation into line with UN Resolutions, we are writing about our concerns about the Education White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*.

We are pleased that the Department of Education has agreed to add a reference to *the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* to the Curriculum and that there is now a commitment to improve schools meals and remove unhealthy foods from vending machines. However, we remain concerned that the new proposals open up schools to sponsorship and ownership by businesses with very little acknowledgement of the risks of this strategy.

Baby Feeding Law Group members have had many years experience of monitoring the activities of food companies and are aware that, under pressure to reduce direct advertising to children, many are now presenting themselves as 'nutrition education companies' or even 'charitable trusts.' The provision of education materials is being used as yet another way to market products, albeit a more subtle one. The White Paper makes no attempt to distinguish between who is and is not an appropriate sponsor and as a consequence we fear that schools will be subjected to an even greater volume of commercially sponsored materials and facilities, all of which will claim to be educational. If the sponsors are manufacturers of baby foods this could have a profound and harmful effect on children's understanding of what is and is not a healthy diet and on young people's attitudes to breastfeeding. While it may not be immediately evident, materials which appear on first reading to be educational will almost certainly be biased and misleading and will undermine the Government's healthy eating messages and the aims set out in the *Choosing Health*, White Paper.

One way to prevent this happening in the context of infant and young child feeding would be for the White Paper to require that all schools adopt guidelines which incorporate the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions. The Code calls on Member States to provide "objective and consistent" information on infant and young child feeding and the WHA Resolutions highlight the risks of conflicts of interest.¹ If these recommendations were followed baby feeding companies would be prevented from providing education materials and other services and more appropriate materials would be used. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* also contains important safeguards regarding breastfeeding and the need to guard against exploitation.²

The Baby Feeding Law Group has agreed to offer to review materials for use in schools, to ensure that they are all compliant with the UN requirements and would be more than happy to discuss our ideas with you. We strongly urge you to consider amending the White Paper to include a reference to the need for compliance with the *International Code* and Resolutions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Patti Rundall'.

Patti Rundall,
on behalf of the Baby Feeding Law Group

Member organisations: Association of Breastfeeding Mothers - Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services - Association of Radical Midwives - Baby Milk Action - Breastfeeding Network - Food Commission - Community Practitioners and Health Visitors' Association - Lactation Consultants of Great Britain - La Leche League (GB) - Midwives Information and Resource Service - National Childbirth Trust - Royal College of Midwives - Royal College of Nursing - Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health - Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative.

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- 1 WHA Resolution 58.28 urges Member States: (4) to ensure that financial support and other incentives for programmes and health professionals working in infant and young-child health do not create conflicts of interest;
- 2 Convention on the Rights of the Child: **Article 17** calls for the “development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being” **Article 24** calls on States Parties to “recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services. (e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents; **Article 36** calls on States Parties to “protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child’s welfare.”

Baby Feeding Law Group Members. February 2006

- 1 **The Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM)** is a membership-based Charity, founded in 1979, with 400 breastfeeding counsellors providing mother-to-mother support to women. ABM takes no money from infant feeding companies.
- 2 **The Association for Improvement in the Maternity Services (AIMS)** is a pressure group, with 730 members which was founded in 1960. AIMS gives information and advice about all aspects of maternity care, including parents’ rights, choices, technological interventions, normal childbirth and complaints procedures.
- 3 **The Association of Radical Midwives (ARM)** is a charity which provides a support for its 1,400 members who are midwives, student midwives and others in the UK committed to improving the maternity care provided by the NHS and who believe that all women have the right to a service tailored more closely to their needs. The ARM is funded by membership fees and takes no money from the baby feeding industry,
- 4 **Baby Milk Action** is a membership-based organization of over 2000 members which aims to save lives and to end the avoidable suffering caused by inappropriate infant feeding. It works within the European and global network, the International Baby Food Action Network, to strengthen independent, transparent and effective controls on the marketing of the baby feeding industry. IBFAN has over 200 citizens groups in more than 100 countries, including nearly all EU Member states. It takes no money from the infant feeding industry
- 5 **The Breastfeeding Network (BFN)** is a mother-to-mother support and membership organisation with 725 members. BFN takes no money from the infant feeding industry.
- 6 **The Food Commission** is an independent national non-profit organization, campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food. It is largely funded by public subscriptions and donations and takes no subsidy from the government or food industry. Its flagship publication, The Food Magazine, has a readership of 10,000.
- 7 **The Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA)** represents its 21,000 members who are community health professionals.
- 8 **Lactation Consultants of Great Britain (LCGB)** represents over 100 Lactation consultants in Great Britain.
- 9 **La Leche League GB** is part of an international organisation that provides information and support to breastfeeding mothers, through mother-to-mother support. LLL GB has 749 mothering members, 1242 peer counsellor members and 97 health professional members. LLLGB does not accept funding from producers of infant formula or any other product or service which might undermine breastfeeding or devalue the importance of nurturing.
- 10 **Midwives Information and Resource Service (MIDIRS)** is an educational charity set up in 1985 which in 2004, distributed 54,000 copies of its Midwifery Digest to midwives and other health professionals, giving an overview of key midwifery and medical research. Its Enquiry Service provides access to the MIDIRS database of over 110,000 articles, with over 500 new references added each month to this valuable resource. Currently MIDIRS processes over 750,000 enquiry requests per annum from health professionals wishing to gain access to this information. The MIDIRS Informed Choice Initiative was launched in 1996 and to date over 1.4 million leaflets have been used by health professionals and prospective parents.
- 11 **The National Childbirth Trust (NCT)** is a membership-based charity, established 49 years ago, and with currently over 64,000 members in the UK and a network of over 350 local branches. NCT provides a range of services for parents including antenatal classes, postnatal discussion groups, breastfeeding counselling which are available to members and non-members alike. The NCT takes no funding from formula companies.
- 12 **The Royal College of Midwives (RCM)** is the only trade union and professional organisation run by midwives for midwives. It is the voice of midwifery, providing excellence in professional leadership, education, influence and representation for and on behalf of midwives. The RCM has a membership of 37,000.
- 13 **The Royal College of Nursing** and the RCN Midwifery Society is the leading professional union for nursing, safeguarding the interests of patients and nursing by lobbying government and other professional bodies to ensure that the views of the profession are heard where it counts. The RCN is a member-led organisation of around 370,000 nurses and midwives and is signatory to WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly Standards.’
- 14 **The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)** has about 7,000 members. The College aims to advance the art and science of paediatrics, improve standards of medical care to children, and to educate and examine doctors in paediatrics. The College also provides information to the public on children’s health care.
- 15 **The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative (BFHI)** is a global programme of UNICEF and the World Health Organisation which works with the health services to improve practice in the support of breastfeeding. In the UK, the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative is commissioned by various parts of the health service to provide advice, support, education, networking, assessment and accreditation.

